

https://www.enidnews.com/news/high-tech-test-determines-likelihood-lincolns-assassin-died-in-enid/article_018beba2-08d7-11ef-972e-4f8e9823e6c7.html

EDITOR'S PICK

TOPICAL

The mummy of David E. George

“HISTORY NEEDS TO BE REWRITTEN

High-tech test determines likelihood Lincoln's assassin died in Enid

Joe Cummings | Special to the News & Eagle
May 4, 2024



By Joe Cummings

Special to the News & Eagle

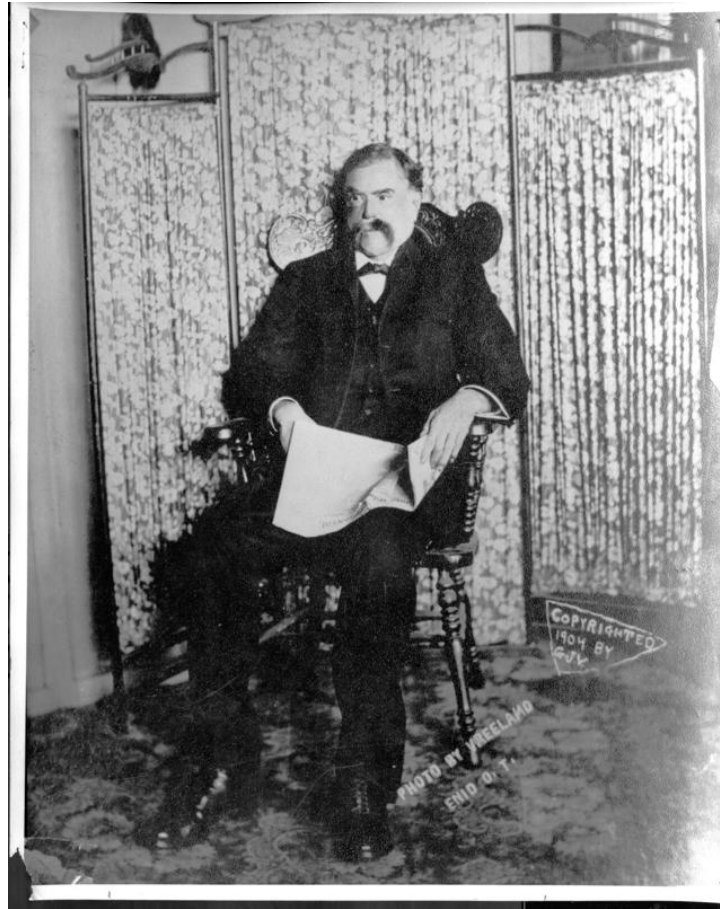
“At approximately 10:30 a.m. on January 13, 1903, in the Grand Avenue Hotel in Enid, the screaming of David Elihu George, who occupied Room No. 4, brought others to his side,” according to an account written by the Oklahoma Historical Society.

The Jan. 17, 1903, edition of the Enid Daily Wave reported that George stated to the attendants rushing to his deathbed that he was actually John Wilkes Booth. He had successfully eluded the officers pursuing him after assassinating President Abraham Lincoln and had since been living incognito for many years.

Other news reports stated that George made the deathbed confession after taking a lethal dose of strychnine.

The Enid Morning News of Jan. 14, 1903, read, “From Frank Corry, drug clerk at Watrous Harley’s, it was learned that ... the deceased purchased 15 grains of strychnine. No doubt can exist that the demise ... was premeditated and the poison was self-administered.”

The body was turned over to W.P. Penniman’s Undertaking where the story – and the body of George – would take on another life.



David E. George was embalmed and set up for display in an Enid storefront following his death.

Photo courtesy of the Cherokee Strip Regional Heritage Center

Story intrigues thousands

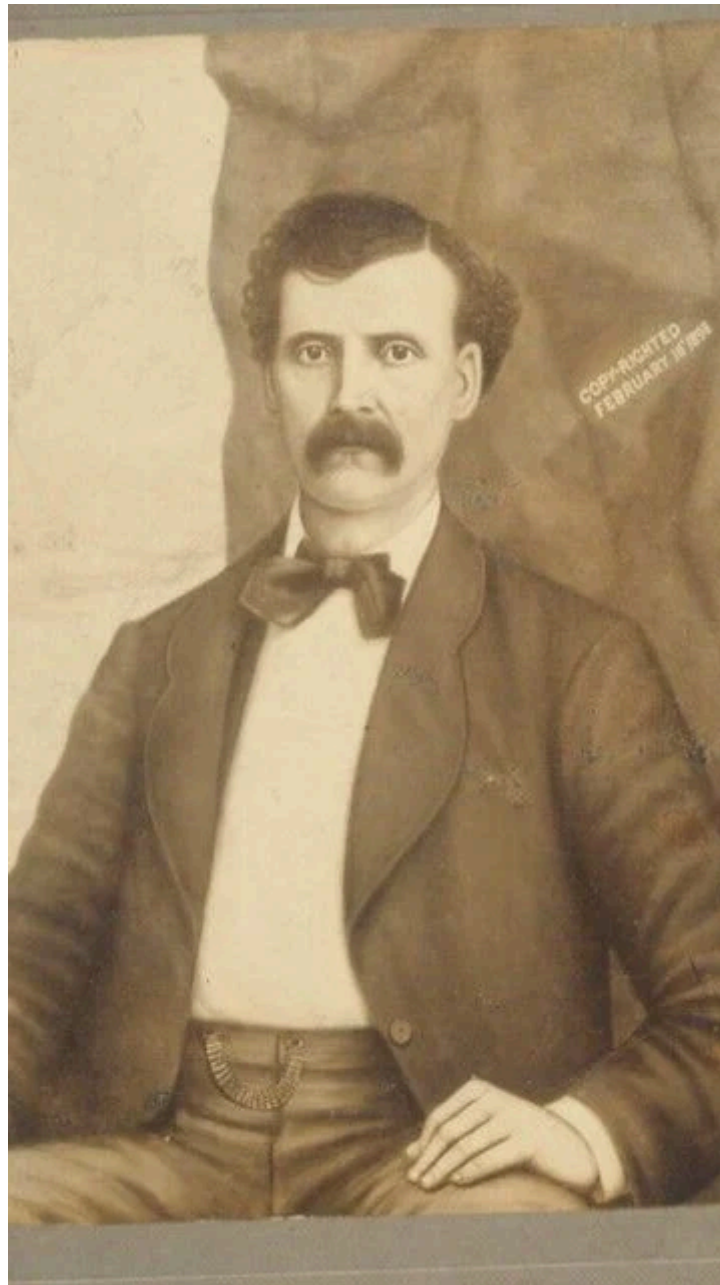
The reports of George's alleged confession and suicide intrigued the community. Thousands of people came to see the body. Penniman had so many people coming through his building, he decided to sit the corpse in a chair and tie him to it, then put a newspaper on his lap. He placed the body in his storefront window for onlookers to view.

Enid did not have time to douse the flames erupting around David E. George before hearing George's name was really John St. Helen. The man's attorney, Finis L. Bates, came to Enid from Memphis, Tenn., where he identified George as his friend, John St. Helen. He showed Penniman and his assistant a tintype picture of St. Helen that the deceased allegedly had given Bates years prior.

Bates would later lecture on John St. Helen — aka David E. George, aka John Wilkes Booth — at the Enid Opera House with admission prices of 25 cents to 50 cents. The lectures were reported by The Enid Weekly Wave of June 4, 1903.

The tale began in 1872 when young attorney Bates met with St. Helen in his home in Hood County, Texas. St. Helen had a small general store next to the large mill on the banks of the Paluxy River. His tobacco and alcohol were very popular, and he asked Bates to obtain the licenses to sell them.

It was then he told Bates his story.



John St. Helen, aka David George

Photo courtesy of E.H. Swaim papers | Booth Family Center for Special Collections | Georgetown University Library

George, St. Helen and Booth

“My name is John Wilkes Booth, a son of the late Junius Brutus Booth, Sr., the actor, and a brother of Junius Brutus Booth the second, and Edwin Booth the actor,” Bates said St. Helen told him. “The death of Lincoln, and the succession of (Vice President Andrew) Johnson, a Southern man, was the only hope for the South from misrule and the confiscation of the landed estates.”

St. Helen gave Bates a picture of himself for future identification, asking him to notify his brother, Edwin Booth of New York City. Attorney Bates explained that he later moved to Memphis, and St. Helen left for Leadville, Colorado.

Twenty years had passed before Bates examined the body of George in the presence of Penniman and his assistant. George's height, weight, age and appearance matched up with Booth. His leg had a fracture of the shinbone 6 inches above the ankle. He had a high thumb joint on the right hand, the same as Booth. He had a small scar on the right eyebrow, and it was uneven just like Booth. It was caused by a sword duel in a play.

The Enid Weekly Wave of June 11, 1903, reported the long-awaited decision by the people of Enid.

"The identification of the remains (of David E. George) as those of J. Wilkes Booth by the descendants of the Booth family is prima facia evidence that Booth was not killed in Virginia ... but that he lived, and they knew it. The remains are now under the control of the Booth family with ... burial in Baltimore.

"The corpse sitting in an armchair ... cured as well as a Swift ham ... placed in burial case ... was shipped to the Booth family."

Elaborations and displays

However, another new chapter began for the mummy of David E. George.

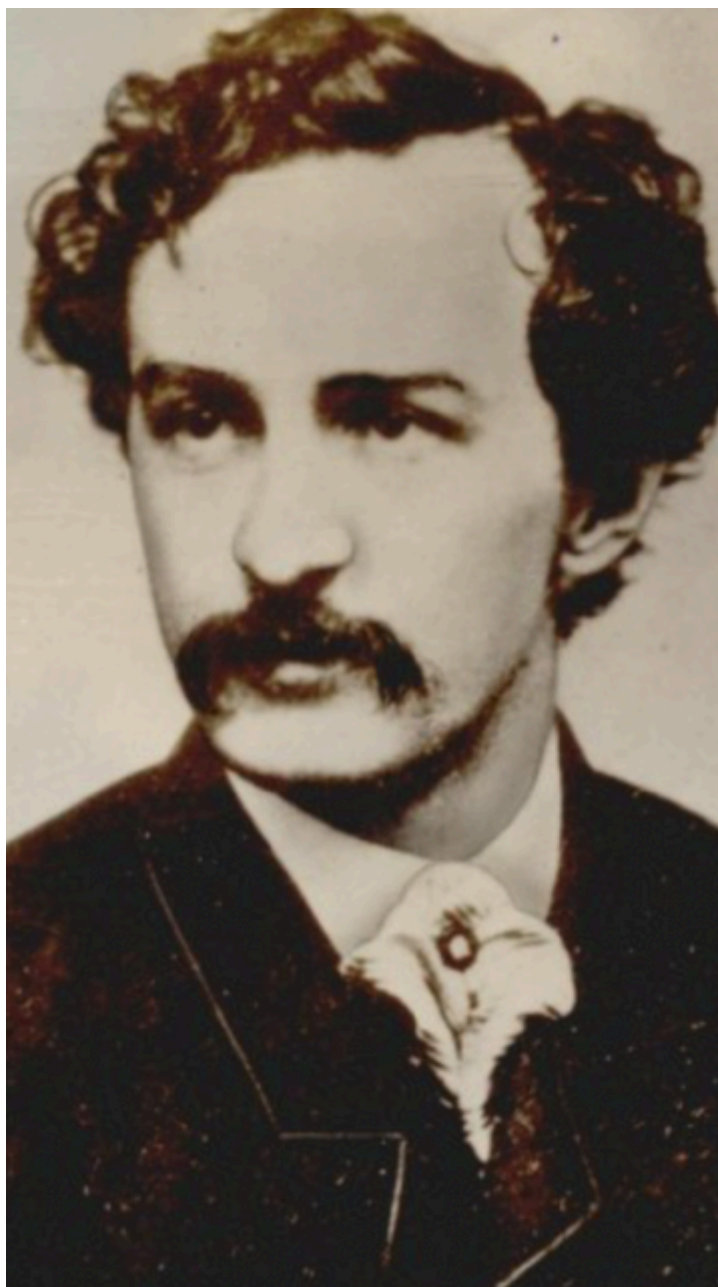
Instead of shipping George to the Booth family, Bates allegedly began renting the body out to carnivals, state fairs and midways as the corpse of John Wilkes Booth. It was even displayed at the St. Louis World Fair in 1904.

After Bates died in 1923, his wife sold the corpse to William Evans, the "Carnival King of the Southwest."

The mummy later became part of Jay Gould's Million Dollar Circus. In 1931, the mummy was on a tour of Chicago, where a team of six doctors x-rayed the mummy, revealing a healed ankle fracture, and a deformed right thumb and an x-ray of the stomach had revealed a ring with the letter "B."

Noted Maryland educator and historian Nate Orlowek reported that the last known viewing of George's mummy was in the 1970s in New Hope, Penn.

"The most compelling fact is that George, as St. Helen, related to Bates details of a botched plan to kidnap Lincoln that would have been known by Booth, but which weren't released from government records until 1935, after Bates' death." Orlowek said.



Abraham Lincoln assassin John Wilkes Booth
Photo courtesy of the Oklahoma Historical Society

Evidence provides possible conclusion

Edward Colimore, a veteran reporter for the Philadelphia Inquirer, reported on applying 21st-century technology to track a 19th-century assassin:

In 2018, examinations and analysis were made of three photographic images: (1) a man named John St. Helen from 1877, (2) the embalmed corpse of David E. George from 1903, and (3) a photo of John Wilkes Booth taken in 1865. Photo recognition software is not as definitive as DNA results, but is widely used by law enforcement agencies. Facial characteristics can be like a fingerprint.

After researchers obtained the best images available, they fed them into a high-resolution scanner with 5,000 other white males to begin a process to meticulously analyze the faces for similarities, such as the spaces between the eyes, the jaw lines, the shapes of the nose, and cheekbones.

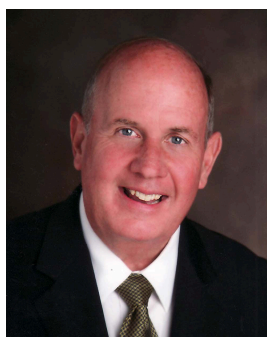
In less than one minute, results came back that left the researchers stunned.

The data showed that the three photographs just picked out of 5,003 photographs – St. Helen, George and Booth – were of the same man! George's photo was nearly a perfect match with Booth's, within the top 1% of those bearing similar facial features, said researchers who worked with the creator of the New York Police Department's first facial recognition unit.

Even more amazing, George was within one pixel of having the exact same eye structure as Booth. Reporter Colimore believes, based on the preponderance of evidence, that Booth maybe did indeed escape.

"This is the first time any independent scientific test has been performed to try to settle this controversy," said Orlowek, who has been on the trail of George and his true identity for 50 years. "This high-tech test has determined there is a 99.9 percent likelihood that Enid's David E. George is John Wilkes Booth ... and now history needs to be rewritten."

About the author



Joe Cummings is a prolific researcher and writer on Enid and Oklahoma history.

Cummings earned both bachelor's and master's degrees in English from Oklahoma State University. He earned a bachelor's degree in funeral service from the University of Central Oklahoma. An Enid native, he spent 42 years as a local funeral director, helping him establish deep and lasting relationships in the community and region and exposing him to many, many stories about the region's history.

After retiring from Brown-Cummings Funeral Home, Cummings focused on his passion for researching and writing about local history. A collection of his research articles, "Oklahoma Tall Tales Uncovered," was published in book form in 2022 by The History Press and is available in local bookstores and on [Amazon.com](https://www.amazon.com). His history podcast with the same title is available on Apple Podcasts.

Cummings lives in Enid with his wife of 53 years, Becky. They have three children and seven grandchildren.

About the author {p align="center"}{img
src="<http://static.cnhionline.com/enidnews/news/cummings.jpg>" width="200"
height="248" /} {p style="text-align: center;}Joe Cummings is a prolific
researcher and writer on Enid and Oklahoma history. {p style="text-align:
center;}Cummings earned both bachelor's and master's degrees in English from

Oklahoma State University. He earned a bachelor’s degree in funeral service from the University of Central Oklahoma. An Enid native, he spent 42 years as a local funeral director, helping him establish deep and lasting relationships in the community and region and exposing him to many, many stories about the region’s history. {p style=”text-align: center;”}After retiring from Brown-Cummings Funeral Home, Cummings focused on his passion for researching and writing about local history. A collection of his research articles, “Oklahoma Tall Tales Uncovered,” was published in book form in 2022 by The History Press and is available in local bookstores and on [Amazon.com](#). His history podcast with the same title is available on Apple Podcasts. {p style=”text-align: center;”}Cummings lives in Enid with his wife of 53 years, Becky. They have three children and seven grandchildren. {related_content_uuid}54c69438-c748-4b55-ac46-c426411e2501{/related_content_uuid}

Click for the latest, [full-access Enid News & Eagle headlines](#) | [Text Alerts](#) | [app downloads](#)

Cummings is a local historian who provides stories to the Enid News & Eagle. He offers a tip of the hat to John Zarrillo, head of Archival Processing, at Georgetown University; Oklahoma Historical Society and historian Karen Nace of the Hood County, Texas, Genealogical Historical Society. A very special thank you to Edward Colimore, a respected veteran reporter for The Philadelphia Inquirer and Maryland historian and educator Nate Orlowek.

Have a question about this story? Do you see something we missed? Do you have a story idea for the News & Eagle? Send an email to enidnews@enidnews.com.

Tags

Anatomy

Medicine

Law

Photography

Trade

Politics

The Economy

Criminal Law

Journalism

Crime

History

Police

Publishing

Computer Science

Job Market

Genealogy

Trending Video

[Enid News & Eagle](#)